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THE STORY OF MOTHER BICKERDYKE

BY E. V. ERLANDSON, R.N.

*Assistant Superintendent of the Training School, Wesley Memorial
Hospital, Chicago*

The Illinois Nursing Act provides that every registered nurse who continues in active practice shall, annually, during the month of April renew her certificate of registration by the payment of a fee of one dollar to the Department of Registration and Education. The Department has sent out notices to the registered nurses of the state, enclosing a card to be returned with proper remittance. On this card the registered nurse is requested to state whether she is practicing nursing independently, or is in the employ of a hospital, sanitarium, etc., at a stated, regular salary, or is not actively engaged in nursing. Since the first nursing law was enacted in Illinois the State has issued, approximately, 8,000 registered nurse certificates.

The registered nurses of Illinois, through their State Association, requested the Department to issue a renewal certificate emblematic of the profession, and suggested a reproduction of the statue erected to the memory of "Mother Bickerdyke" in Galesburg. The Department granted the request, and has adopted the suggestion. The renewal certificate will be an attractive card upon which will be reproduced the statue of "Mother Bickerdyke," as she was gratefully called by the Northern soldiers in the Civil War.

This statue was erected by the State, in Galesburg, in 1906. It stands in a beautiful park, which is surrounded by stately elms. Here also is the Knox County Court House, the buildings of Knox College, the new St. Mary's Hospital, the Baptist Church, the Conservatory of Music of Knox College, and the Galesburg High School. These surroundings, appropriate in every way, represent justice as well as the care of the sick, religion, art, and education, and are the silent partners of this memorial.

The statue is mounted on a granite pedestal, about five feet in height. There are two figures of bronze, both of heroic size, one representing a wounded soldier in a reclining position, dressed in the uniform of the army of that day, with his cap on his head and his rifle resting on his left arm. The other, depicting a nurse, is kneeling and supporting the suffering man, while offering a drink of water. On the east side of the base is an inlay tablet of bronze with the following inscription:

Mother Bickerdyke (1861—Army Nurse—1865)

She outranks me.—General Sherman

On the west side of the pedestal, there is also an inscription:

MARY A. BICKERDYKE

1817 - - 1901

In recognition of her patriotic and heroic devotion to the "Boys in Blue," in camp, in hospital, and on the field, the State of Illinois has, under the auspices of the Mother Bickerdyke Memorial Association, erected this statue, 1904.

The conception and execution of this impressive work of art is due to the genius of Mrs. Alice Ruggles Kitson, the most famous of American women sculptors.

So far as the writer has been able to learn, this is the first and only monument erected in this country that dignifies and commemorates the work of the nurse in this exalted and beautiful manner. Indeed, if my memory is not at fault, there are but four other like monuments in all the world, one in Austria and two in England. One of these emphasizes the gratitude of the English people for the pioneer, but wonderful work of Miss Florence Nightingale, and the other was recently erected to keep alive the service and final sacrifice in the form of martyrdom of Edith Cavell for the suffering soldiers of her native land. The fourth one is in Toronto, Canada.

During the Civil War, when typhoid and other diseases, to say nothing of the sufferings due to shot and shell, were working havoc among the soldiers of the northern armies, President Lincoln issued a call for nurses. This was repeated everywhere in the north, especially from the pulpits. Mrs. Bickerdyke, while attending services at the Congregational Church in Galesburg, heard the plea. She immediately went home, made arrangements with neighbors to care for her five children, and with five thousand dollars' worth of medical and sanitary supplies, was soon hurrying southward. This was in 1861, and now began the career of an army nurse that did not end until the last soldier was discharged from the hospital in Springfield, Illinois, in 1866. She was first stationed at Cairo, where Mary Safford, the "Cairo Angel" was already at work. As the sick soldiers were much in need of baths, her first move was to obtain bath tubs. This she did by having a pile of empty hogsheads sawed in two, and every sick soldier was given a bath and clean linen. Next, diet kitchens were fitted up, and Mother Bickerdyke assumed command.

An instance of her ability to handle annoying situations was shown by what she did when she found that delicacies from her supplies were disappearing in a way for which she could not account.

Some dried peaches were stewed and left to cool on the kitchen table. In due time there was a distressing amount of abdominal symptoms among the waiters, stewards and ward masters. "Umph! Umph! So peaches don't agree with you, eh? You may be worse off next time you eat stolen sauce; there will be ratsbone in it some night." A refrigerator with a lock was ordered from the north; one night the lock was broken and the next morning a cook was in the guardhouse. Thus it was all along the line. "By whose authority are you here?" said a surgeon to her. "I am here in obedience to the Lord God Almighty! Have you any higher authority? Stand out of my way!" was the answer. But this divine authority was soon certified to by the necessary mundane officials. All right-minded surgeons soon begged for her assistance, and those high in command saluted her.

"Who is the complainant?" asked General Sherman of an officer with a grievance. "That meddlesome old woman from the north," was the reply. "Oh, well, I can do nothing for you; she outranks me," said the general.

The following order was issued: "All guards, pickets and military authorities will pass and re-pass Mrs. Mary A. Bickerdyke from any point within the lines, and all military railroads and chartered steamboats will grant her free transportation. By order of General U. S. Grant."

Using this pass, she succeeded in getting supplies whenever she needed them. The men at the front showed signs of scurvy and needed vegetable diet. There were plenty of vegetables in Nashville, and she finally persuaded General Sherman that she needed two carloads a day, and she got them. Soon she was distributing potatoes and onions up and down the railroad line from Huntsville to Chattanooga.

Her interest was always for the sick and wounded and her influence in keeping up their morale was not the least part of her beneficent influence.

Her hospital boat was the first to land at Pittsburg after the battle of Shiloh—when the crafts of war for that purpose were crude; and there seemed to be lint and bandages, clean linen and hot coffee, sugar and milk, wherever she went.

During a short furlough she came north to raise money, stimulate contributions for articles needed by the army, direct shipments, look after the orphan children of her soldiers, and to encourage interest on the part of the civilian population in the needs of the men at the front.

Her great collection of livestock from among the farmers of northern Illinois is still a vivid memory that has been handed down from among the people of that region. In less than twenty days she was able to collect and send two hundred cows and almost a thousand

laying hens to her camp of 15,000 sick soldiers in Memphis who, as she said, were trying to get nourishment out of poor milk (half chalk and water), for which they were paying fifty cents a quart.

The soldier had his monthly pay—little as it was, yet something—he had his food and clothing, and was cared for as well as could be under the circumstances. What did Mother Bickerdyke have in the way of compensation? Who can believe that she served all those dreadful five years with no recompense, save that of an approving conscience and the love of the soldiers and their friends?

It was not until twenty years after the war that a movement was started by the Grand Army of the Republic to get a pension for her. The bill was introduced in the Senate by Senator Logan of Illinois, and in the House by Representative John D. Long of Massachusetts. It was reported out of these committees with most hearty endorsements, setting forth the fact that in their estimation she had done more work for the army than any Brigadier General, and had saved more lives than any one surgeon. Notwithstanding these high estimates, the House Committee ungenerously recommended that the amount be reduced from fifty to twenty-five dollars per month. That she got, and nothing more. Alas! the gratitude of republics.

Mary A. Bickerdyke died on November 8, 1901, at the age of eighty-four, at Bunker Hill, Kansas. After the funeral rites at her home, the body was taken back to Galesburg, Illinois, where impressive services were held.

It was not until 1903, that funds were raised by the Grand Army of the Republic and the Woman's Relief Corps and these, with an appropriation by the State of Illinois of \$5,000.00 were sufficient to erect the monument to commemorate the activity and noble deeds of this truly great woman who was the greatest army nurse of her time.

It has become the pleasure and the privilege of the nurses of Illinois to add their tribute to the life and work of their sister who so glorified the work of the army nurse, by placing the picture of her statue on their first re-registration cards.

Note—The quotations in this paper were taken from a book on Mother Bickerdyke by Mrs. Kellogg of Kansas.